

Article

Migrant Perceptions of Their Social Inclusion, Social Networks, and Satisfaction with Life in Northern Spain

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyse the individual perceptions of belonging to social networks among migrants living in northern Spain, exploring various dimensions such as perceived inclusion and life satisfaction. A quantitative analysis was employed with data collected through a survey of 373 migrants from different ethnic backgrounds. The findings indicate that (1) women have higher levels of perceived satisfaction with their life and social networks; (2) young migrants have higher levels of friendship networks; (3) the highest levels of perceived inclusion were found among Central Europeans, followed by individuals from Latin America, Asia, Africa and, finally, Eastern Europe; and (4) each social network under analysis was positively correlated with perceived inclusion and satisfaction with life. In summary, the results emphasise that a greater presence of networks is associated with higher levels of perceived inclusion and life satisfaction.

Keywords: social networks; migrants; inclusion; satisfaction with life; perceptions of belonging



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1. Introduction

Migratory movements form part of human history and have occurred for millennia [1]. These movements have traditionally been driven by biological, cultural, economic, and political needs. However, the advent of globalisation, a central aspect of modernity, has given rise to large-scale migratory movements, seemingly accelerating and amplifying this fundamental process [2].

Migration is inherently diverse, encompassing a wide range of migrant profiles based on their place of birth, country of residence, and the reasons that may have caused them to migrate. Therefore, it is a process that remains in constant flux, characterised by extreme multi-ethnicity and continual evolution [3].

Historical events have added momentum [4] to migration, particularly conflicts, wars, humanitarian crises, and natural disasters. In an attempt to clarify the current situation, Arango [5] pointed out that “rapid and sustained economic growth, the increasing internationalization of economic activity, worldwide decolonization processes and emerging economic development processes in the Third World, brought with them an intensification of migration, both internally and internationally.” Brown and Gort [6] also stressed that globalisation has contributed to the surge in transnational migratory flows, affecting an increasing number of countries. Sandell, Sorroza, and Olivie [7] have coined present-day migratory movements as the “new era of migration”.

The displacement of millions of migrants and refugees, victims of multiple conflicts that have erupted on the African continent in recent years, highlights the magnitude of the challenges facing leaders, NGOs, professionals, and societies in general. In 2018 alone, a

staggering 2.8 million people migrated to the EU [8], a figure that is similar to previous years. Globally, the number of refugees under international protection reached 25.4 million in 2015 [9].

The European Union (EU) and its regions currently face two fundamental and interrelated challenges: demographic shifts within their societies and the need to formulate social inclusion policies to address the influx of migrants and ethnic minorities. In this context, migrants have contributed to the rejuvenation of European populations, fostering growth and positively impacting host countries through the development of intercultural social networks. Nonetheless, it is crucial to allocate resources toward migrants regarding social, health, and labour services and education [10].

Fertig [11] highlighted our current need for more understanding regarding the necessary strategies and policies for achieving the full inclusion of groups residing in vulnerable situations. Despite the ongoing process of social inclusion spanning several decades across various EU countries, achieving comprehensive inclusion remains elusive. It should be noted that multiple authors allude to the profound culture shock experienced by migrants seeking new opportunities in unfamiliar ethno-cultural contexts [12]. According to Berry [13], the cultural gap between local society and migrants can impose considerable stress on the latter.

It is important to recognise that social and cultural exclusion of ethno-cultural otherness constitutes an undeniable socio-political reality supported by extensive scientific investigations and studies across various disciplines [14–18]. The enactment of numerous national anti-immigration laws has left millions in a state of legal and institutional defenselessness and social helplessness worldwide, denying them basic rights such as access to housing, health, and education [19–21]. The migratory flows within the European Union call for new intervention paradigms, as this issue extends beyond transnational mobility. In many instances, we encounter patterns of interaction that border on the imposition of cultural hegemony and forced acculturation, ultimately resulting in the alienation of non-national migrants [17].

Migrants and refugees often find themselves at a socio-political crossroads, facing situations of institutional defenselessness and frequently experiencing a quasi-legal status that leaves them in a state of liminality. In this situation, neither their rights as migrants and refugees are fully recognised [22], nor are they granted access to the rights enjoyed by national subjects, such as education, health, and housing. The attitudes driving such behaviour were explained by [17] using the term alienation. According to this perspective, national subjects tend to “domesticate” and “eradicate” any ethnonational otherness, viewing it as an alternative fatherland to the existing one (which is also hegemonic). In Hage’s words, migrants and refugees, whose ethno-cultural capital is acquired rather than natural, are particularly susceptible to having their basic rights denied through the rhetoric of national identity [14,15] and dualistic discourse [23]. Hage also argued that the assimilation of migrants is a process related to limits and norms, which can be transferred, changed, and diluted. Within this context, a significant paradigm inherent to scientific studies on migratory phenomena emerges: integration vs. inclusion.

Therefore, there is a gap in the literature to examine migratory scenarios within intercultural social networks, assessing the level of inclusion in the host society, and exploring migrants’ perceptions of life satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to explore that gap using a European case study in northern Spain.

The Basque Country witnessed the last armed conflict in Western Europe, which lasted fifty years. The aftermath of this conflict led to the frequent use of ethnocultural markers in identity formation, resulting in a highly intricate and volatile social framework. The existence of categories related to internal otherness and political violence gave rise to strong, performative narratives [16,24–27], rhetorics of identity [14,15], and dualistic discourse [23], contributing to the Basque society’s pronounced insularity against external influences [28,29]. This insularity had a tangible impact on migration patterns, with the Basque Country experiencing a relative dearth of migratory arrivals compared to the rest

of Europe. As the intensity of the conflict diminished in the 1990s, migrants from various parts of the world began to consider the Basque Country as a destination to settle and start a new life [30]. In comparison with the rest of Europe, the delayed surge in migratory flows towards the Basque Country could be attributed to additional factors. The region is home to one of the few pre-Indo-European languages spoken on the continent, alongside Hungarian and Finnish. The existence of a co-official language, Basque or *Euskara*, quite unlike any other European language, has long posed a significant barrier to communication with local residents, hindering the development of social networks. This linguistic complexity is not unique to the Basque Country but extends to the rest of Spain, where co-official languages co-exist alongside Castilian Spanish, presenting a challenge for migrant communities, particularly those from Latin America [31].

Information on the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), one of the two Basque regions in northern Spain, is presented below. According to the data in Figure 1, we can identify three distinct stages if we look at the influx of foreign citizens to the BAC. From 1998 to 2008, the BAC witnessed a surge in migratory flows attributable to economic growth. The onset of the economic crisis in 2009 marked a significant turning point, leading to a substantial decrease in the number of arrivals. This phase persisted until 2013–2014, characterised by challenges associated with the economic downturn. More recently, there has been a resurgence in migratory flows to the BAC. Notably, in 2019, 19,201 people arrived in the community, reflecting a return to levels similar to those observed before the economic recession. The following graph shows the growth trends in the local community (blue) and the migrant community (purple) since 1998.

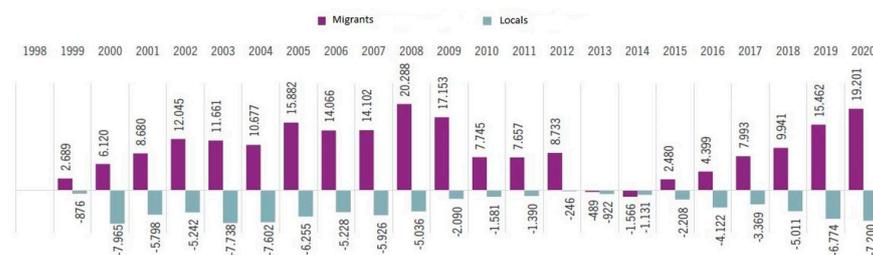


Figure 1. Growth of the local community (blue) and the migrant community (purple) since 1998.

Analysis of the evolution according to the main areas of origin highlights the diverse nature of the migratory flows toward the BAC. As of 1 January 2020, slightly more than half of BAC residents born abroad originated from a Latin American country (51.1%). Additionally, 16.2% were born in a European Union country, and 14% originated from the Maghreb region. Over the years, the different ethnic groups have varied in numbers, although Latin America has remained the main point of origin. The roots of these differences may be found in the demands of the Basque labour market for different profiles, most of which are related to the service sector, domestic services, and care for older people [30].

In the past year, the foreign-born population residing in the BAC increased by 19,201, reaching a total of 241,193 individuals, representing 10.9% of the population. Data from 2020 show the consolidation of the upward trend observed in previous years. Nonetheless, compared with national figures, the BAC, at 15.2%, remains below the Spanish average [30].

A closer inspection of the data reveals that of the 19,201 individuals of foreign origin who arrived in the Basque Country in 2019, most came from a Latin American country (72.5%), while others originated from the Maghreb region (14.4%), Asia (4.8%), and sub-Saharan Africa (4.7%). Hence, there is a clear consolidation in the resurgence of migratory flows from the Americas, signifying a response to the economic recovery of the Basque Country. A notable aspect is the feminisation of migratory flows from Latin America to the BAC. Of the 13,918 individuals of Latin American origin who arrived in the past year, 8040 were women, constituting 57.8% of the total [30].

The past two decades have witnessed a notable shift in the Basque society's perception of the migrant population. In the early 2000s, the native population often regarded new

arrivals with suspicion, displaying, at times, xenophobic attitudes. These attitudes stemmed from the perception of migrants as competitors for access to educational, health, or social resources [32]. The onset of an economic crisis in 2008 further intensified negative views of migration [33], fueled by a decline in employment opportunities and the subsequent repercussions for social welfare [32]. Currently, as several studies point out [33], there has been a significant decrease in the perception of immigration as a problem. However, certain areas, such as schools and residential areas, still display lower tolerance levels [33]. Therefore, the data suggest a somewhat more optimistic view of the immigrant population's contribution to Basque society, with fewer fears and greater confidence.

However, it is important to acknowledge that in neighbouring contexts, it has become evident that stigma towards immigration remains a reality that has an integral impact on people's lives [34].

Considering that the data presented are based on the previously mentioned survey results, in this research, Structural Functionalism was chosen as the theoretical framework guiding the analytical strategy [35]. This sociological perspective views society as a complex system with interconnected parts, each contributing to the stability and functioning of the whole [36]. In the case of the present research, those variables will be the social networks, life satisfaction, and self-perceived levels of inclusion among migrants living in the Basque Country, northern Spain. In fact, the study aims to establish the relationship between the respondents' social networks and their self-perceived levels of inclusion and life satisfaction.

Experts in the field have long theorised about the concepts of integration and inclusion, their multiple meanings, and their range of interpretations [37]. Inclusion is characterised by a feeling of recognition and attachment to a certain group of people, community, or society. It is important to recognise that inclusion takes various forms, and thus implies respecting diversity and rejecting any discriminatory attitude [38]. Morata [39] added, "Recent studies have linked social participation and the construction of inclusive citizenship to identity processes of the community, which can ostensibly curb social exclusion." It might be imagined, therefore, that the degree of connection with the rest of the community is a decisive factor in the level of social inclusion experienced by an individual.

An effective approach to including migrants and refugees should prioritise their complete and equitable engagement in the economic, social, cultural, and political facets of life within their host country [40]. This inclusive process should address and alleviate the initial stress and anxiety stemming from challenges such as insecurity, housing, and employment. It should also facilitate the acclimatisation to new ways of life [41].

The concept of social inclusion, particularly within the academic field, remains controversial, with varying perspectives and meanings. For some, it means the assimilation of minority groups into the dominant culture, which can result in a process of deculturation [42]. Others conceptualise it as integrating or retaining individual liberties while learning about the new country of residence [19].

Various inclusion frameworks were proposed by researchers [43–45]. However, in this article, we emphasise the relevance of the participatory dimension of social inclusion. Social inclusion and exclusion are ongoing and dynamic social processes that one-off, simplistic interventions cannot address. Circumstances that enshroud both symbolic violence [16,25] and structural violence [18,46] often motivate social exclusion that can negatively affect processes of inclusion in which migrants often try to participate. Nonetheless, as the data compiled in the present study show, migrants themselves might be the ones who choose not to participate in these inclusive processes. In the context of a diaspora, migrants within a host society will often form social clusters, and they might consciously choose to be part of familiar structures rather than seek integration within an ethno-culturally alien host community [2].

According to Knoke [47], social networks refer to the "structural relations among social actors" and comprise the outcomes of connections between individuals, subgroups, and greater groups. It is a broad field of analysis that can be approached through different

disciplines. In this paper, we will refer to the social networks of migrants within host communities and will consider the following social networks: family, friends, and neighbours. All of these networks work towards including migrants within the host community.

At a European level, several studies have focused on the impact of such social networks on the quality of life and future plans of migrants [48–50]. For instance, a study by Knight, Thompson, and Lever [51], analysed the situation of Polish immigrants in the South Wales region of the UK from 2008 to 2012. Their results indicated that the decision to migrate to the host community was driven by the social networks established pre-arrival, which often included family and friends. Social networks were also relevant for these migrants when deciding to stay in the host country. It is noteworthy that Liu [52], in another study examining migration from Senegal to France, Italy, and Spain, highlighted gender differences among migrants. The findings indicated that, for male migrants, friends constituted the primary social network, whereas family held greater significance for females [52].

In another longitudinal survey of refugees within the UK, Cheung and Phillimore [53] studied gender differences, finding that social networks within the UK are key to reducing gender differences in terms of inclusion in the host society. In contrast, Koelet and de Valk [54] analysed feelings of loneliness among European migrants in the Netherlands, finding no difference between males and females in that regard.

In a similar study, Koelet, Van Mol, and de Valk [49] analysed the social networks of European migrants in the Netherlands. The study highlighted the importance of having relatives in the host country and that the more extensive the contact with the local family network, the greater the opportunities for establishing a local friendship network. The results also indicated that European migrants might move “...within international communities in the country of destination, and [might] more easily establish links with people in the same situation. . .” ([49], p. 453). Likewise, a more recent study on the inclusion of young Romanians in Catalonia [55] concluded that young migrants perceive more self-identity within “their ethnical group of origin, although a tendency towards hybridization is revealed as the length of stay increases” (p. 920).

In a larger study, Pratsinakis and colleagues [56] analysed the social networks within various multi-ethnic European cities and found that neighbourhood-based inter-ethnic relationships were common among migrants. The study also found that these social ties did not necessarily become friendships, although they provided an opportunity for socialisation among migrants. In contrast, some studies have demonstrated that migrants often lack social networks when they arrive in a host country [49,50]. Some of the difficulties that migrants face when arriving in a host country are related to the cultural distance between themselves and the culture of the host societies and a lack of proficiency in the language of the host country [49,57–59]. For instance, Djundeva and Elwardt [59] analysed feelings of loneliness among Polish migrants in the Netherlands, showing that homogenous, restricted kin-based networks were related to deeper feelings of loneliness.

Concerning age, it is important to note that this factor influences the types of social networks established by migrants. For instance, Hussein [60] found that older Turkish migrants living in the UK lacked the necessary resources for social inclusion within British society. However, social networks were key to providing older Turkish migrants with “safety nets at crucial times in their lives” ([60], p. 190). Youth networks have also been analysed in relation to friendship. For instance, in the study by Rübner Jørgensen [61], youth peer networks and friendships were analysed both in Spain and in England. The study highlighted schools as key spaces for the emergence of such peer networks.

The successful inclusion of migrants is decisive in terms of their well-being and development in their host community. For this reason, it is fundamental to understand the experiences and perceptions of migrants in relation to inclusion if we are to combat this shared challenge [62].

Various socioeconomic aspects, such as financial circumstances, citizenship, access to health and educational systems, involvement in sociocultural activities, and housing conditions, become potentially relevant for the inclusion process of migrants and their well-

being [63]. The study conducted by Soriano-Miras, Trinidad-Requena, and Guardiola [64] specified that it is necessary to examine the following dimensions in order to foster effective and holistic inclusion: cultural well-being, structural well-being, community well-being, and subjective well-being. The latter dimension, defined by Kee, Lee, and Phillips [65] as the migrant's cognitive and affective perceptions of their experiences, is essential in terms of satisfaction in the host community. In this context, according to Heizmann and Böhnke [66], integration policies within Europe should actively seek to include these groups by enhancing living conditions regarding the aforementioned dimensions. This approach serves as the basis for effectively ensuring their human rights.

Various studies have analysed the relationship between perceptions of well-being among migrants and variables such as age, gender, and country of origin. For instance, Sand and Gruber [67] conducted an analysis using data from the Survey of Health, Aging, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) across several European countries, observing a significant gap in Subjective Well-Being (SWB) between the migrants and the local population. The authors noted that this gap tends to gradually diminish with age. They also pointed out that Southern, Eastern, and Non-European migrants perceived lower levels of SWB than those from other countries [67].

In line with this idea, Soriano-Miras, Trinidad-Requena, and Guardiola [64] studied the well-being of Moroccan migrants in Spain. Regarding the age of the migrants, this study also concluded that older migrants have a better perception of well-being, and suggested that this could be attributed to the fact that "with age, immigrants put down roots, which helps generate this well-being" ([64], p. 649). This idea is supported by a recent study concluding that relinquishing certain aspects of one's roots may promote a sense of belonging while also exposing migrants to stressful and internal-conflictive situations [55].

Migrant inclusion and development largely rely on access to work. However, they often encounter challenges in entering the labour market. Consequently, numerous studies have aimed to identify the contextual aspects that might act as facilitators or barriers in this regard, including social networks, immigration policies, language skills, recognition of studies and qualifications, and the attitudes of employers [68,69].

Gender disparities in labour market participation were identified in various studies, highlighting the vulnerable situation of migrant women [70]. These women often have to deal with the "double disadvantage" of being both a migrant and a woman" ([71], p. 18). In a study on the migrant population in Spanish and Portuguese labour markets, Oso and Catarino [72] argued that male employment among migrants was mostly in construction, while women had a greater presence in roles linked to care and cleaning sectors. The authors concluded that the labour market integration of migrants tends to perpetuate gender roles [72]. Moreover, the global inclusion of women within the labour market has not resulted in a redefinition of male responsibilities within the domestic arena [73]. According to a study in the Spanish context, this has led to an increased demand for private care services, primarily fulfilled by migrant women [74]. Regarding women's caregiving roles, Bradby and others [75] suggested that:

The gendered nature of healthcare work is inherent to the way that health and welfare systems have developed over the years: supporting the health of others, both in private settings and mediating with professional service providers, was taken for granted as a natural part of women's roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, wives, partners and neighbours (p. 33).

Furthermore, a study carried out by Garlington and others [76] concluded that the women's caregiving role has been negatively affected because of a "poorly designed and restricted welfare policy" ([76], p. 30). They add that due to the gendered dichotomy of public/private spheres, women are severely disadvantaged in areas such as the labour market, social and political participation, or education (especially further education). This observation aligns with the sociocultural construct of the "nice girl," wherein women are encouraged to embrace a set of values and social norms associated with the female gender (niceness, modesty, femininity, kindness, discretion, and avoidance of controversy) [77].

Several studies conducted in the Basque Country have revealed that many of the well-being dimensions mentioned earlier are linked to the networks that migrants establish in their host communities. For instance, in a study by Pérez-Urdiales and her colleagues [78] regarding the social networks of sub-Saharan migrants, the access of sub-Saharan African women to healthcare services was examined. The authors noted that these women faced the most barriers when trying to access the healthcare system. The study highlighted that social networks played a crucial role in facilitating access to healthcare services. Moreover, a previous study within the same context pointed out that migrant women perceived greater difficulties during the administrative processes than when receiving healthcare attention itself [79].

Despite the regional, national, and international efforts made through integration policies, Pardo [80] pointed out that the inclusion of migrants relies, to some extent, on their active participation in the inclusion process. As was evidenced in this study within the Latin-American community living in European cities such as Amsterdam, London, and Madrid, migrants engage with host societies “through the use of informal social and civic networks and transnational activities developed by migrants themselves, instead of through formal policies designed to integrate them” ([80], p. 296). Likewise, in another study focused on Senegalese male migrants in the Basque Country, Ramsøy [81] concluded that social networks play a significant role in their narratives and are key in their process of adaptation to the host society.

In this context, the main objective of the present study was to analyse the perceived level of inclusion and satisfaction with life among migrants living in northern Spain. The specific objectives were: (a) to explore migrants’ perceptions of belonging to social networks (broad social network, family network, neighbourhood network, and friendship network) based on gender, age, and country of origin; (b) to analyse migrants’ perceptions of satisfaction with life and level of inclusion in the host society based on gender, age, and country of origin; and (c) to examine the relationship between belonging to social networks (broad social network, family network, neighbourhood network, and friendship network) and the degree of satisfaction with life and levels of inclusion among the migrant population in northern Spain. Addressing these objectives will provide insights into the reality of the immigrant population, which should help to develop strategies aimed at enhancing their quality of life. Therefore, through this study we aim to answer the following questions: Are there associations between social networks, life satisfaction, and perceived inclusion among migrants in northern Spain? Do social networks, life satisfaction, and perceived inclusion vary by age, gender, and country of origin of migrants?

2. Materials and Methods

This is a quantitative study based on Structural Functionalism. Its analytic strategy is based on quantitative analysis to examine the relationships between variables and identify how different components of a system contribute to overall stability or dysfunction [82]. In the present case, this was conducted through a survey designed to measure migrants’ perceived level of inclusion and satisfaction with life, as well as their level of participation in social networks (broad social network, family, neighbourhood, and friendship networks) in northern Spain. We analysed the responses of 373 migrants (49.9% men and 49.6% women) from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Participants were randomly selected individually or from various contexts such as religious communities, social and cultural organisations, diaspora, and networks. The researchers administered the surveys on a face-to-face basis, with 25 different questions/items on the aforementioned topics.

2.1. Instrument

The following three instruments were used to measure the study variables:

- Perception of inclusion: The pictorial scale of Woosnam [83] was used. This scale indicates the degree of perceived inclusion through drawings. The scale had a strong internal consistency (c. alpha = 0.693).
- Satisfaction with life: The satisfaction with life scale was used, comprising 5 items [84]. (c. Alpha = .89).
- Social network: The Lubben scale (LSNS) was employed to evaluate the migrants' social network. This instrument was designed to assess social isolation in older adults by measuring perceived social support from family, friends, and neighbourhood [85]. In this sample, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.914 for the family network subscale; 0.854 for the neighbour network subscale; and 0.870 for the friendship network subscale. The reliability of the entire scale was 0.909.

2.2. Sample

The sample consisted of 373 immigrants predominantly from the Basque Country in northern Spain, ranging in age from 18 to 65, with a mean age of 32.89 years (SD = 11.47). Of the participants, 49.9% were men ($n = 187$), and 49.6% were women ($n = 186$). In terms of their geographical origin, 48.3% originated from Latin America ($n = 180$), 24.1% from Eastern Europe ($n = 90$), 20.9% from Africa ($n = 78$), 3.8% from Asia ($n = 14$), and 2.9% ($n = 11$) from Central Europe.

2.3. Data Analysis

For this study, descriptive analyses were used to examine the study variables (inclusion, life satisfaction, and social networks), focusing on the differences between mean scores. Additionally, analysis of variance (ANOVAs) and post-hoc analysis using the Tukey test were conducted to examine the differences between the following variables: inclusion, life satisfaction, social networks, age, gender, and country of origin. Subsequently, Pearson's correlation analyses were conducted to assess the relationships between the three main variables of interest: inclusion, life satisfaction, and social networks. Data analyses were performed using the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 24).

3. Results

3.1. Satisfaction with Life, Broad Social Networks, Family Networks, Neighbourhood Networks, and Friendship Networks According to Gender and Age

Table 1 shows the mean scores on life satisfaction, the degree of inclusion, and the different social networks according to gender and age. The data indicate significant gender differences regarding life satisfaction, broad social networks, family networks, neighbourhood networks, and friendship networks, with women scoring higher than men in all cases.

Table 1. Satisfaction with life, inclusion, and social networks according to gender.

	Gender						F (1, 351)
	Men			Women			
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Satisfaction with life	170	3.35	0.860	173	3.53	0.844	0.049 *
Inclusion	181	3.79	1.47	181	4.064	1.65	0.103
Broad social networks	173	2.66	0.728	167	2.96	0.731	0.14.461 ***
Family networks	180	3.06	1.10	175	3.32	0.988	0.5.906 **
Neighbourhood networks	177	1.99	0.817	176	2.28	1.02	8.713 **
Friendship networks	179	3.01	1.00	177	3.26	1.02	5.671 **

Note. Likert Scale 1–5. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Additionally, as shown in Table 2, significant age-related differences were also found for friendship networks. In this case, the younger participants presented higher levels of friendship networks.

Table 2. Life satisfaction, inclusion, and social networks according to age.

	Age										
	N	M	SD	18–35			35–65			F	Post-Hoc
				N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Satisfaction with life	222	3.39	0.856	128	3.52	0.855	3	3.46	0.808	0.438	[2]
Inclusion	227	4.01	1.50	133	3.64	1.63	3	3.55	1.71	0.827	
Broad social networks	212	2.84	0.752	126	2.73	0.734	3	2.66	0.111	1.224	
Family networks	223	3.24	0.978	130	3.09	1.05	3	3.44	0.585	0.986	
Neighbourhood networks	222	2.12	0.929	129	2.18	0.959	3	1.50	0.600	0.842	
Friendship networks	222	3.26	1.04	132	2.92	0.953	3	3.05	0.419	4.671 **	1>2, 1>3

** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2 presents the differences in satisfaction with life, inclusion, broad social networks, family networks, neighbourhood networks, and friendship networks according to the participant's country of origin. The data reveal notable differences in life satisfaction, with individuals from Central Europe reporting the highest levels, followed by Eastern Europeans, Latin Americans, and, subsequently, individuals from Asia and Africa who obtained similar scores. Similarly, significant differences emerged in the level of inclusion, with those from Central Europe showing the highest scores, followed by those from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and, finally, Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, differences were observed concerning social networks, including broad social networks, family networks, neighbourhood networks, and friendship networks (see Table 3).

Table 3. Satisfaction with life, inclusion, broad social networks, family networks, neighbourhood networks, and friendship networks according to country of origin.

Satisfaction with Life					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	171	3.44	0.831	7.548 ***	5>2, 5>3, 5<4, 5>1
Eastern Europe	85	3.76	0.718		
Africa	72	3.05	0.903		
Asia	15	3.09	0.848		
Central Europe	9	4.05	0.671		
Inclusion					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	173	4.11	1.62	4.030 ***	5>2, 5>3, 5>4, 5>1
Eastern Europe	86	3.55	1.46		
Africa	78	3.74	1.44		
Asia	16	3.85	1.42		
Central Europe	9	5.59	1.22		
Broad Social Networks					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	167	2.92	0.655	4.601 ***	5>2
Eastern Europe	82	2.53	0.885		
Africa	68	2.83	0.699		
Asia	15	2.74	0.690		
Central Europe	8	3.23	0.512		

Table 3. Cont.

Family Networks					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	170	3.43	0.883	6.677 ***	1>2, 5>2
Eastern Europe	83	2.74	1.14		
Africa	77	3.05	0.931		
Asia	16	3.20	1.16		
Central Europe	9	3.72	0.600		
Neighbourhood Networks					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	172	1.99	0.894	2.907 **	2>1
Eastern Europe	83	2.35	1.04		
Africa	75	2.27	0.936		
Asia	15	1.78	0.572		
Central Europe	8	2.22	0.629		
Friendship Networks					
	N	M	SD	F	Post-Hoc
Latin America	174	3.31	0.936	9.187 ***	3>2, 1>2, 5>2
Eastern Europe	86	2.55	1.00		
Africa	72	3.29	1.02		
Asia	15	3.26	0.977		
Central Europe	9	3.68	0.542		

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

3.2. Correlations between Social Networks, Satisfaction with Life, and Inclusion

Correlation analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between social networks, perceived satisfaction with life, and inclusion (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlations between social networks, satisfaction with life, and inclusion.

	Broad Social Network	Family Networks	Neighbourhood Networks	Friendship Networks
Satisfaction with life	0.352 ***	0.333 ***	0.250 ***	0.237 ***
Inclusion	0.564 ***	0.461 **	0.284 ***	0.497 ***

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The data displayed in Table 4 reveal correlations between all the analysed variables. Notably, broad social networks show positive correlations with both inclusion ($r = 0.564$) and satisfaction with life ($r = 0.334$). In comparison with the other variables, inclusion emerges as the variable with the highest correlation. Similarly, a correlation was found between family networks and inclusion ($r = 0.461$) and life satisfaction ($r = 0.333$), with inclusion showing the strongest correlation with family networks. Additionally, the neighbourhood network variable shows correlations with inclusion ($r = 0.284$) and life satisfaction ($r = 0.250$), with the former correlation being the strongest. Finally, there is a correlation between friendship networks and inclusion ($r = 0.497$) and life satisfaction ($r = 0.237$), with inclusion also being the most strongly correlated variable in this context.

4. Discussion

This work aimed to analyse the social networks, satisfaction with life, and level of inclusion of migrants in northern Spain, primarily concentrated in the Basque Country. The following discussion will consider the key findings revealed by this study.

First, women showed higher levels of perceived satisfaction with life compared to men. Moreover, women also showed higher levels of social, family, neighbourhood, and friendship networks in comparison with men.

The literature indicates that satisfaction with life is linked to subjective well-being [65], which, in turn, is related to various aspects such as financial circumstances, citizenship, access to the labour market, and health and education systems [63]. Given this premise, it might seem contradictory that migrant women showed higher levels of satisfaction with life, particularly if we consider two factors: first, migrant women typically face a more vulnerable and underprivileged situation when entering the labour market, which is generally recognised within the literature [70]; and second, the persisting gendered dichotomy of public and private spheres still continues to impose severe limitations on women, impacting their access to opportunities in areas such as the labour market, social and political participation, and the education system, especially further education [76].

It is important to approach the obtained results with careful consideration. The data scale, rather than capturing objective dimensions of well-being, relies on the migrants' subjective perceptions. In this regard, according to Litton [77], women's perceptions might be influenced by the gendered sociocultural construct of the "nice girl". Consequently, their evaluation of life satisfaction might be coloured by societal expectations associated with feminised attributes such as niceness, modesty, and non-controversy.

The results also indicate that women showed higher levels of social networks. These findings could be linked to the challenges that women often encounter, facing more barriers than men in terms of inclusion in the host country [70] and, in this context, social networks become decisive facilitators for migrant women [79]. Consequently, women may value their networks more positively than men, who might be more active in the public sphere [76] and may not rely as heavily on social networks to feel included in their host country.

Concerning age, this study reveals that young migrants reported higher scores in social networks related to friendships. This outcome could be influenced by the friendships formed in specific centers, such as schools [61], or other non-formal or informal educational centers, such as leisure centers [19].

Regarding satisfaction with life and inclusion, young migrants have reported higher scores in both scales, followed by the 35–65 age group and, finally, those aged over 65 years. These results run counter to some of the findings reported in the reference literature. For instance, [67] asserted that the gap between migrants and locals gradually decreased with age. Soriano-Miras, Trinidad-Requena, and Guardiola [64] also concluded that older migrants had better perceptions of well-being. This idea was also supported by Petrañas and others [55], who stressed that relinquishing certain aspects of their roots may promote a sense of belonging. However, to explore this further, it would be necessary to conduct a cross-sectional study, analysing perceptions of satisfaction with life and inclusion among the same sample of the migrant population throughout their life or stay in the host country.

Our analyses revealed several findings of considerable importance regarding the migrants' country of origin. The group showing the highest levels of inclusion, satisfaction with life, and networks based on family, friendship, and broad social networks were those from central Europe. Generally, citizens of the European Community encountered fewer profound social and cultural barriers compared to migrants from other continents, particularly if they did not belong to a former colony or diaspora [2,19]. Often, Central European migrants are not perceived as traditional migrants but rather as tourists or highly skilled professionals. This unique perspective might explain why they feel more welcome and included in the host society. Nonetheless, it is important to note this group constituted the smallest cohort among those surveyed in the present study.

The second group, when considering the level of inclusion and networks related to family, friendship, and broad social networks, comprised migrants from Latin American countries. It is worth noting that this group represents the largest community of migrants residing in the Basque Country, potentially explaining the existence of well-developed networks that provide support to their members [19,30]. Consequently, their perception of inclusion was ranked among the highest. However, despite these strong social connections, the level of satisfaction with life of the Latin American migrants was not as high as their

European counterparts (from both Central and Eastern Europe). This observation could be related to the fact that Latin Americans are typically employed in positions that require lower skills and are, therefore, poorly paid [30].

Migrants from Eastern Europe showed the second-highest levels of satisfaction with life; however, they also displayed the lowest levels of perceived inclusion and networks related to family and friendship. Interestingly, in terms of their network related to neighbours, they had the highest scores among all the surveyed groups of migrants. This behaviour suggests a potential attempt to distance themselves from their previous situation in their home country and ethnocultural community, focusing their interests on becoming part of the host community in an inclusive and comprehensive way [55,86].

Overall, migrants from Africa and Asia reported some of the lowest levels of inclusion and satisfaction with life. While African migrants emphasised strong networks linked to their neighbours, possibly due to residing in the same neighbourhoods [87], Asian migrants appeared to have weak networks across all aspects analysed, including family, friends, neighbours, and broader social networks. Overall, migrants from Africa and Asia had the weakest connections to the Basque Country in terms of integrating into the local community or feeling a sense of inclusion, which correlated with their particularly low levels of life satisfaction.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that the higher the perceived levels of social networks, the higher the levels of inclusion and satisfaction, a pattern of results that is consistent across all types of networks. First, a broader social network generally correlates with a higher level of life satisfaction and perceived inclusion among migrants. Second, broader family networks are associated with increased life satisfaction and perceived inclusion. Third, both wider neighborhood and friendship networks are correlated with higher levels of satisfaction and perceived inclusion. These observations are consistent with international works such as the study by Hussein [60], which emphasises the key role of social networks in the inclusion of Turkish migrants within British society. All of the previously mentioned social networks serve as inclusion networks, as they facilitate the integration of migrants into the host society. This observation also aligns with the study by Ramos and colleagues [62], suggesting that individual well-being positively influences the experiences and perceptions of inclusion among migrants. Moreover, Fosslund [68] and Marcu [69] emphasised, in line with the present results, that social networks act as facilitators for accessing the labour market, positively impacting satisfaction with life and perceived inclusion. Even in the specific context of the Basque Country, previous studies have linked the presence of networks to various dimensions of well-being [38].

These findings suggest a potential inconsistency between integration policies and the specific needs of migrants, which are often met through family and peer support. Therefore, integration policies should be refocused toward holistic inclusion that guarantees the rights of migrants and promotes social and cultural equity. The inclusion process should not solely depend on the fate of each migrant, their contextual conditions, and specific networks. Nonetheless, recognising these aspects as decisive throughout the integration process is essential for their effective implementation through integration policies.

Future research should prioritise a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand certain phenomena, such as gender and ethnic differences in inner processes and cosmovision related to social and cultural inclusion. Future qualitative research should also explore the reasons why migrants and refugees leave their home society and the means by which they make their journey. Finally, further studies are needed to examine the role of local people in the inclusion processes of migrants.

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